

STATEMENT OF MAUREEN FINNERTY, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK OPERATIONS AND EDUCATION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS CONCERNING H.R. 136, A BILL TO AMEND THE NATIONAL PARKS AND RECREATION ACT OF 1978 TO DESIGNATE THE MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS WILDERNESS AND TO AMEND THE EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK PROTECTION AND EXPANSION ACT OF 1989 TO DESIGNATE THE ERNEST F. COE VISITOR CENTER.

April 10, 1997

Thank you for the opportunity to offer the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 136, a bill to amend the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 to designate the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness and to amend the Everglades National Park Protection and Expansion Act of 1989 to designate the Ernest F. Coe Visitor Center.

We support this effort by Congress to recognize the two mightiest protagonists of South Florida's river of grass. Ms. Douglas and Mr. Coe led the charge to establish Everglades National Park and raise public awareness to restore its vitality.

Everglades National Park, dedicated in 1947, preserves the subtropical region at the southern tip of Florida. Everglades National Park, consisting of 1.5 million acres, has been nominated by the United States and accepted by the world community as a World Heritage Site, a Wetland of International Significance, and a Biosphere Reserve in recognition of its international significance. It is the only site in the United States that has received all three designations which, while not supplanting United States jurisdiction or management, do serve to underscore the superlative qualities of the park on a global scale. The park is well-known for its diverse and unique wildlife, including wading birds, eagles, manatees, turtles, and various fish species. It is the only place in the world where alligators

and crocodiles exist side by side. The park has 13 species of endangered birds. It has open prairies and extensive saltwater areas with sawgrass marshes, mangroves, and shallow bays. Its 1.3-million acres of wilderness make it the largest subtropical wilderness in the continental United States.

In 1926 and again in 1928, Senator Park Trammel of Florida introduced legislation calling for an investigation of the Everglades to determine if a portion could qualify as a national park. The National Park Service had made some preliminary inquiries into the matter when Ernest Francis Coe, a landscape architect, came forward to champion the idea of creating a national park in southern Florida. Coe came to Coconut Grove from New England in 1925 and was overwhelmed with the natural beauty and wildlife of the Cape Sable and Ten Thousand Islands area. He wanted to find some way to protect the bird rookeries and hammocks from hunters and developers, and the establishment of a national park seemed like an ideal solution.

On May 31, 1928, Coe met with Arno B. Cammerer, Assistant Director of the National Park Service, to discuss his project. Cammerer only agreed to have the National Park Service study the area if Congress appropriated funds for such an undertaking. Coe promised to contact Senator Trammel and said he would prepare articles for submittal to popular magazines to publicize the area.

In December 1928, Senator Fletcher of Florida introduced a bill in Congress to designate the Tropic Everglades National Park. Soon after, in Miami, Ernest Coe formed an organization which later became known as the Tropic Everglades National Park Association. Coe was elected Secretary and continued supporting efforts to make the area a national park. President Roosevelt signed legislation

on May 30, 1934, that granted the Secretary of the Interior permission to select an area for a national park in certain counties of southern Florida.

On December 6, 1996, which marked the beginning of the 50th year celebration of the park's establishment, the National Park Service administratively dedicated the Ernest F. Coe Visitor Center in recognition of his pivotal role as "The Father of Everglades National Park."

In 1947 Marjory Stoneman Douglas published her landmark book, The Everglades: River of Grass, which greatly increased interest in and concern for the Everglades. Ms. Douglas, who celebrated her 107th birthday on April 6, symbolizes the struggle to save the Everglades. In 1994 President Clinton awarded her the Medal of Freedom, the Nation's highest civilian award.

Ms. Douglas has long, often, and publicly stated her wish to have Coe's efforts suitably commemorated at the park. She has expressed, through her associate Dr. Sharon T. Richardson, her support for and delight with the idea of both designations. Dr. Richardson has added her opinion that, "Nothing could mark her life more suitably than to give her name to this resplendent wilderness."

Mr. Chairman, we could only wish to echo this sentiment and add that, in our view, nothing could be more appropriate during this 50th anniversary year of Everglades National Park, than the commemoration of these two legends as proposed in H.R. 136. I would be pleased to entertain questions from the committee.

